



VIRTUAL WORLDS

What are virtual worlds?

A virtual world is a computer-based, simulated environment. You can create a digital representation of yourself, known as an *avatar*, and then interact with other avatars to connect, collaborate, and socialize.

A growing number of educational institutions and non-profits are using virtual worlds to create communities, share information, and to serve as training and teaching venues.

You need Internet access to visit a virtual world. Some virtual worlds require you to download software. Some common virtual worlds include [Second Life](#), [Club Penguin](#), [Habbo](#) and [Whyville](#).

Who is using virtual worlds?

- 825,000 active Second Life users as of April 2010; and
- 116 million of user hours were spent in Second Life during the first quarter of 2010.¹
- 32 nonprofits with “offices” in Second Life through The Nonprofit Commons organization alone.²

Virtual worlds in response to HIV

- Provide HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and research information in an immersive, interactive learning environment.
- Facilitate “in-world” support groups for people infected and/or affected by HIV.
- Provide a virtual space to honor people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses, such as with a virtual candlelighting memorial or AIDS quilt.
- Give people an environment to model behaviors which may lead to changes in real life.

Examples from the field

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Second Life: [slurl.com/secondlife/CDC Island/191/86/22](http://slurl.com/secondlife/CDC%20Island/191/86/22)
- Second Life’s Karuna Island – HIV/AIDS-specific island that provides information and support for people infected and affected by HIV: www.karunahiv.com
- Nonprofit Commons in Second Life - a virtual community consisting of more than 80 nonprofit organizations: www.nonprofitcommons.org

Where can I learn more about virtual worlds?

- Nonprofits and Second Life: Promoting Causes Inside Second Life –For Real World Impact (PDF): npsl.wiki.techsoup.org/file/view/Non+Profits+and+Second+Life+Report+1008.pdf
- CDC’s Introduction to Virtual Worlds: www.cdc.gov/healthmarketing/ehm/virtual.html

Thinking about using a virtual world?

- Check out “[Understanding Your Audiences](#)” at AIDS.gov to help decide if virtual worlds are an appropriate way to reach your target audience(s).

¹ Massively, “Linden Lab hands down Second Life metrics for Q1 2010,” <http://www.massively.com/2010/04/28/second-life-q1-2010-metrics/> Accessed on 07/12/10.

² Nonprofit Commons, “Second Life in Numbers,” <http://npsl.wiki.techsoup.org/Second+Life+In+Numbers> Accessed on 07/12/10.

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